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WHAT

Robbie was Good For.

MRS. M. D. BRINE.

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WHAT

ROBBIE WAS GOOD FOR.

When little Robbie Moore fell from a shed and was carried to his mother's arms an unconscious and seemingly lifeless burden, the sympathizing neighbors rejoiced when at last the good old Doctor Blake pronounced life not to be extinct. And still more they rejoiced when the child's merry blue eyes put off their unusual languid, heavy lidded appearance, and returned to their wonted light with

returning health, and the plaintive voice regained its natural cheerful tones.

But when, after many weeks, the little boy began to look strangely about the shoulders, and his small back, which should have been firm and straight as an arrow, grew out with a decided curve, so that finally Dr. Blake gently broke the news to the troubled parents, "Your boy must never expect to be well again," then those same neighbors, with pitying glances towards blacksmith Moore's humble cottage, exclaimed, "Poor thing! what will he ever be good for?"

But while his earthly friends distressed themselves with that question, and shook their heads sorrow-

fully because no satisfactory answer came, little Robbie's best Friend, the Friend who had chosen to afflict him, and seemingly darken his whole future, was looking down from heaven and watching the patient, helpless boy more lovingly even than the dear mother whose tender arms enfolded her one little ewe lamb every spare moment of the day, and whose careful eyes never ceased watching over his comfort. God knew, if none other, what the small frame was worth, and what Robbie could be good for. He knew for he had planned the boy's life from the beginning, and Robbie's parents did n't think, when first he was given to them, a bright-eyed, beautiful baby, that

God had lent them a son to perform a sweet mission on earth, and teach them with the Giver's help many truths yet unlearned by the happy parents. So neighbors said, "Poor thing! what will he ever be good for?" and the father and mother in their hearts echoed the cry

Robbie awoke one morning after a restless night of pain, and heard his parents softly conversing in the adjoining room. "He will always be a miserable puny little fellow," said his mother with a sigh; "and I think neighbor Jones was right when she called it a cruel fate which spared the dear boy's life only to prolong his season of misery."

"Neighbor Jones had better at-

tend to her own affairs!" was the blacksmith's gruff reply. "Would you rather your son had never opened his loving eyes again on that dreadful day we thought him dead, than to have his blessed company with us, even though he be not the sprightly lad he once was? bless him!"

Something in his father's voice made Robbie sure he wanted to cry, only he was a man and would n't. And the mother answered with a loving glance towards the small room that belonged to her boy, "O James, it is the pain he endures that hurts me so! I would almost rather be planting flowers on his little grave, than watch him twist and turn in his sleep and moan

with the pain night and day. My poor boy! what will he ever be good for?"

Robbie lay very still in his bed, but his face grew whiter, and the wistful blue eyes filled with tears. "*Was* he only a useless little thing after all?" he thought. "Would he never be of any account in the world?" Then he remembered things his Sunday-school teacher had told her scholars, and though at the time of her remarks he had not appeared more attentive than children usually are during confinement between four walls when they would prefer being out in the sunshine, yet now all she had talked of came back to him and he had nothing to do but lie quietly there and

think of the once carelessly learned lessons.

There had been plenty of sick little children who had yet lived useful lives: that he knew, because he had read about them in story-books, and his teacher had told him so too. But then *they* had all seemed to have some particular talent for a particular line of usefulness, and when he had heard about those cases, he had thought but little about them; of course *he* would never be like those poor sick things, he with his six years of strength and growth and his active little limbs with which he could run like a deer and climb like a monkey.

But Robbie had always been surrounded by Christian examples

and influences. His mother had taught him to pray, and trained him to revere and love God. And his father always encouraged him when he did right and punished him if he did wrong: all this before his fall. Since his ill-health every one had treated him more kindly than ever, and in fact the child did not know, so carefully had the truth been hidden from his knowledge, how sorely stricken his young life had been. He only knew that pains came upon him night and day, and that his hands seemed whiter than they used to be, and that it hurt him to walk about much. When he looked in the small glass that hung just where his tiptoes would permit him a

glance at himself, he only saw a white thin face, and dark circles under his eyes. Mamma explained that sickness always caused that, and he had day by day expected to feel better and be like other boys.

Meanwhile the little back was growing more and more out of shape, and by-and-by the boy could not sit comfortably in his chair unless mamma put a pillow behind him. "My jacket don't set as it used to, mamma," he would say once in awhile, trying to pull it down, and wondering that it felt so tight over his back. And poor mamma would turn her head aside to hide a tear as she saw only too well why the little jacket had lost its usual fit. Never again would she

see a straight, nobly-formed Robbie Moore in the boy before her, only a puny, hunchbacked little fellow, who claimed on account of his deformity, double the love and tenderness given him before.

On this morning when he listened with his eager ears to the talk between his father and mother, he remembered that it was his birthday. Seven years old, and just a year since he had fallen from the shed.

"I should think God would have felt sorry about such a little fellow as I am," he thought fretfully; "and hurt a big boy, if he wanted some one to be hurt."

"O Robbie! that is wicked!" whispered conscience, and straight-

way Robbie softened down and said a little prayer in his heart.

Presently his mother came in and stooped to kiss him. The smile on her lips could not hide the tears in her eyes, and the little boy put his arms about her neck and whispered, "I heard you talking, mamma, and I want you to tell me what is really the matter with me. I will not cry one bit, only tell me all you know about me; because I guess you know more than I do, mamma dear!" patting her cheek and kissing her and trying to be very brave and cheerful.

Then very gently, restraining her tears lest he should grow frightened, the poor mother told her boy all the sad truth. He heard her through

quietly and without one word of interruption, though his breath came hard and fast, and he winked fast to keep back the tears.

When Mrs. Moore laid him back upon the pillow, and kissed the white face before going down for his breakfast, Robbie knew all things concerning him, knew that he was no better in figure than old hunchbacked Jim, the beggar who lived in the next village and whom Robbie had always pitied; knew that never again would he be like other boys, able to run and walk with ease.

Child-fashion, he thought of everything. There was his new sled which Uncle John, the village shoemaker, had sent him in anticipa-

tion of the coming winter. There were his skates which last year he had learned so nicely to use. He was well then, O dear! And no wonder the child-heart was unable to bear its sudden burden; no wonder he rebelled against God, against everybody, and even the kind doctor who had attended him patiently though uselessly all this time. He cried and cried, and finally slept from exhaustion and his mother, while he slept, knelt beside him and kissed the tears from her boy's lashes and thin cheeks.

II.

DAYS passed, and Robbie, scorning the idea of being a *baby* over what could n't be helped, shut his lips tightly when pain prompted tears, and tried to be a little man. Still it was hard for him to lie still and think of the future, and harder still when once he heard a neighbor whisper the familiar question, "What will the poor child ever be good for?" She did not intend the remark for his ears, but he moved slowly across the room to his mother's side and stoutly exclaimed: "I 'm good for mamma and papa to love, even if—if"—a little quiver of the voice here pierced his moth-

er's heart—"I am only a little hunchback!" The neighbor left him clasped in mamma's arms. Oh, the tenderness of mother's arms! and the world of comfort there is in mother's kiss!

"I wonder if you have ever asked God to make me well, mamma?" presently asked the boy, and she who held him hid her eyes in his golden hair as she replied very softly,

"Your mother has been nearer God in prayer, my boy, since your illness than ever before. He will answer when it seems best to him; but, O Robbie! Robbie! it is almost breaking mamma's poor heart to see her boy suffer so!" If the child's sickness was likely to lead his mother nearer the throne

through prayers for him, than ever before she had approached, who can say that he was not already good for something which angels might well rejoice over?

By-and-by, when the little boy seemed stronger, and the pain came at greater intervals, he used to sit at the door of his father's shop and talk to the school children as they passed to and from school. Some of the children were rude and rough, and had so little innate delicacy of feeling that Robbie was frequently twitted about his inability to run and jump as they could, and even called "girl-baby," because now and then their taunts would make him cry. The blacksmith, however, when he discovered their

mischief, would speedily show the boys what he thought of their rudeness, and Robbie, the victim of their scoffing, would himself plead for their release, so quickly did he forgive and try to forget his wrongs. Others among the children would talk with him kindly, pitying the lameness and deformity that kept their little comrade almost a prisoner in his cushioned chair, while they could romp and play with all the freedom of their well-formed limbs.

Sometimes Robbie would think sadly, "I wonder why God did not make one of those boys lame instead of me? they were no better than I, and they climbed sheds as often as I did! O dear! I wish

there had n't been any shed at all, and I had n't had any kite!" Sometimes, too, he would have even a sadder wish in his poor little heart: "I wish the doctor had just let me die. I did n't want to live this way, and I never can be of any use in all my life!" This wish was always accompanied with a sob and choking sensation in Robbie's throat which the watchful mother-ears caught, and the tender mother-eyes wept for.

But the natural sunshine of the little boy's temper, and the silently transforming power of the Spirit of God would shine out bright and clear after these occasional cloudy seasons, and he became so good and patient that everybody loved

him. The few bad boys who teased him soon learned to dread the style of argument used by the blacksmith, and left the lame boy more in peace. The other children honored him with the title of "Judge," because once or twice he had playfully settled a quarrel between them to the satisfaction of all parties, and presently got into the habit of referring to him whenever a difficulty occurred; and rarely did Robbie fail in giving wise judgment and securing a happy result. Perhaps his affliction had rendered him prematurely thoughtful and given him wisdom beyond his years; at any rate he grew daily more considerate and gentle and seemed far wiser than many a child

older than himself. "Blessed are the peacemakers," wrote the recording angel after each effort of Robbie's to restore good feeling between little friends who had quarrelled and complained to their small judge, one against the other. And "Blessed are the peacemakers," was echoed in heaven as the glad record was known. But Robbie, sitting in his chair by the door of papa's shop, only knew that somehow he was growing to be a very happy boy, and "his heart felt so warm and contented lately; what was the reason?" he wondered.

Then came the season for sleds and skates. Robbie looked from his window one morning and there was the beautiful snow, coming

thick and fast from the mysterious upper world, whitening all the landscape, and dressing the trees till everything looked like fairy-land. "O dear! O dear me!" he said. It was so hard to know that he could never again join the boys in their coasting down hill, and their fun on the pond. Dr. Blake had forbidden the exercise as being too violent, and indeed Robbie was far too delicate to attempt such sports. But for all that it was hard to watch the snow and hear the shouts of the boys as with sleds and snowballs they welcomed the winter's coming. For a few minutes it rained in Robbie's heart and over his cheeks, poor little white cheeks that used to be so rosy! Then out came

the sunshine again, and peeping through his eyes dried every tear, and the boy was himself again.

Pretty soon a voice was heard: "Want any wood? any wood to-day?" And there was "Tim, the wood-boy," as he was called, plodding through the snow with the little wooden-wheeled hand-cart full of kindling wood, which it was hard work for him to pull through the deep snow.

Tim paused a moment to watch with wistful eyes the boys who, careless of the fast-falling snow-flakes, were merrily sliding down the hill. He had never owned a sled, and would almost as soon have thought of owning a gold-mine as a sled or any other luxury

for play, for he had much ado to keep himself and grandmother in clothing, scant as it was; but he could look at the more fortunate little fellows and if he envied them nobody need know it. "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods," was a command of which Tim knew nothing, and I am afraid he was breaking it with all his might at the moment Robbie saw him from his window.

Robbie could see with half an eye what Tim was longing for, and all at once a kind thought hopped into his mind. Ah, how many such suggestions come to us from above, and go away unheeded! But not so with this one! Robbie cried out suddenly, "O mamma! I know

what I'm going to do!" Then he tapped on the window, and Tim looked round. "Wood to-day?" he asked, ready for business at once.

Mrs. Moore went to the door and called him in. "No wood to-day, Tim, but Robbie wants you; come in and see him." Tim looked at his boots; one red toe peeped out of a hole, and the others were fast gaining freedom in like manner, while a portion of the heel was visible through the large slit which ran up the back of Tim's well-worn boot. He felt ashamed of his appearance, but it could n't be helped after all, so in he marched to the small room where the hunchbacked boy awaited him. Robbie's parents

were poor to be sure, but not so badly off as Tim's grandmother, and the little invalid did not forget to be grateful for his blessings such as they were, as he looked at ragged, cold little Tim.

When the poor wood-boy went away he wore a stout pair of Robbie's shoes, and dragged merrily after him Robbie's sled, to which the skates were securely strapped. Such a happy boy as Tim was that morning! His load of wood could be hauled on the sled during "business hours," and after that—why *he* could coast a little as well as other boys, for the hill was free to all and he had a right to the beautiful snow as well as the next boy.

So here was another thing that Robbie was good for. He had made a poor boy happy, and helped him to bear his daily burden of hard work by a kind act which would ever be remembered. But the child-heart quivered a little, for it was only a little seven-year-old boy after all who was called upon to suffer and be patient, and it required many of mamma's kisses to heal the sore spot in her boy's heart.

Pretty soon there came a wee stranger for Robbie to love with a brother's love, and amuse while mamma was busy elsewhere. Baby did n't care whether brother's back was straight or crooked. She only knew that her sunshine was found

in his soft blue eyes, and that in his loving voice lingered all the music she cared for. And mamma said to the neighbors, "My Robbie is *such* a comfort to me!" If he had been well and strong like his comrades, would he have been such a comfort to mamma? would he have daily drawn her to the throne of grace through her pity for him, thus teaching her to love her Saviour more? would he have been among the children the little "peacemaker" they considered him, if he had like them been able to romp and play, and quarrel and strike for his rights, boy-fashion? Oh, there were a hundred things which Robbie proved himself good for, though he himself seemed un-

conscious of them all; the constant making of sunshine in his home; the many little helpful things that mamma could hardly have done without. Surely the deformed boy's life was not so useless as the neighbors thought.

III.

THE winter passed, and with it passed away much of Robbie's strength. When spring came, the little boy could only sit under the trees beside his father's shop for a little while during the day, and then the strong father-arms would carry him back to the house, and lay him tenderly on the lounge.

Many tears did mamma shed secretly to see her boy grow daily so thin and pale; but he was the same merry boy at heart, and many a plan for the future he formed lying quietly on his couch—plans which, alas! might never be carried out. Every day the little hunch-

back was unconsciously setting his waiting crown with very precious stones, found only in the golden city above; and every day the angels that go to and fro to minister to God's people looked on him more lovingly; and daily the little child crept closer into his mother's heart, and clung to her with a beautiful love, and a hope that some day she could make him well again with her care.

One day he felt strong enough to sit on the doorstep of his house in the bright sunshine of early fall. Mamma was busy inside, and papa's stout arm was making the anvil ring across the way. Presently neighbor Jones' son, a lad of Robbie's age, went whistling by,

and nodded to Robbie carelessly. The grocer's store was near, and Robbie saw with indignation that Bill Jones helped himself unobserved by the owner to one or two fine apples, which were hidden speedily underneath the young thief's jacket. When he suddenly turned and caught Robbie's eye, Billy crimsoned all over his face, and hastily approached.

"I say, you good-for-nothing, if you dare tell on me you 'll catch it, I tell you, first chance I get."

Robbie looked the boy straight in his guilty face, and unawed by the threat, replied, "Somebody besides me saw you, Bill Jones; and you 'll surely be punished some day for stealing. God saw you."

Bill turned on his heel uneasily. "Pooh! no cant, please, Robbie. I 'm proof against that humbug."

"I do n't know what you mean by cant," replied Robbie; "but if it is humbug to say God saw you, then you *can't* be proof against *that* humbug."

Billy laughed at Robbie's little pun, and the latter seeing him good-natured again, grew bolder, and urged him to carry the fruit back.

"Why, I 've often taken things when nobody saw," said Billy, "and I 'd fare badly for fruit if I did n't help myself now and then."

"But Somebody always sees you, Billy," urged Robbie. "God looks out of the sky all the time, and sees every time you take a thing that

is n't yours; and the Bible says, 'Thou shalt not steal,' you know."

"Does it? I forget about what I learned at Sunday-school. But I guess God does n't care about watching little fellows like us all the while."

"O Billy, if I thought God was n't taking care of mamma and papa and little sissy, and even poor little lame me, every day and night, I would be so miserable, you can't think."

"How do you know he does?" persisted Billy, longing to taste his fruit, yet not quite dead to conscience; and conscience, taking advantage of Robbie's words, was pricking him pretty severely.

"Why, because the Bible says

he sees even a sparrow; and he *made* us—so of course he will take care of us. What a question!" rather scornfully. "And I feel it here," laying his tiny hand on his heart, "that God is watching me always. And, Bill Jones, if you dare eat those stolen apples, maybe as a punishment you 'll be sick and have to die!"

Rather a severe lecture from Robbie, but he only spoke as he felt, and the plain truth did Billy more good perhaps than a more gently-expressed reproof might have done. The idea of dying was rather alarming to Billy, who had never felt quite easy in his conscience at any time of stealing; and somehow little Robbie's ear-

nest face and earnest words impressed him as he was not generally impressed by a reproof; so he drew the apples from their hiding-place, and with a wistful glance at them, said, "Maybe I'd better put them back."

"Maybe you had," repeated Robbie decidedly, "unless you buy them."

"Got no money for that, not a cent. Don't want them if they aint free, gratis, for nothing," declared Billy, and he reluctantly retraced his steps and replaced the fruit. "Wish you'd kept in the house, Rob Moore," he said fretfully, repassing Robbie; "you don't let a fellow have one bit of comfort with your preaching." Neverthe-

less, Billy Jones would never again be able to steal without the remembrance of the hunchback's sweet, earnest face to awaken his sleepy conscience.

Ah, neighbor Jones, you were one of the first to ask, "What will Robbie Moore ever be good for?" and lo! your own son can tell what he has done for him, despite his poor weak back and crippled form.

IV.

THE next winter came quickly on, and Christmas time was near. Robbie sat alone in his father's shop, left in charge for only a few moments. It was rainy and dismal outside, and two boys came shiveringly inside for the warmth of the forge. Some sport that they had planned the rain had interrupted, and while warming themselves their tongues were quick to speak complainingly of the day, and disrespectfully of Him who had ordered the change of weather.

Little Robbie had been reading a pretty new Bible that some kind friend had given him. The new-

ness of the book, though he was always fond of reading God's word, had tempted him to keep it in his hand, with his child's love for beautiful things, more than usual; and his heart was full of the sweet Bible stories he found there. The rude voices of the boys disturbed him, and he said, "Please go out of papa's shop; he does n't like to have you here, you know, when you are bad."

"Who 's bad, you Robbie Moore, I 'd like to know?" cried one angrily, while the other laughed and snapped his fingers.

"You are," was Robbie's answer. "You are talking rudely of God, and he made the weather, so you should not find fault. Besides, you

swore just now, Tom Blake, and your father would be angry if he knew it."

"Ho! Mr. Preacher, who's going to tell him if you don't blab?" was the reply.

"I sha'n't blab; but you know God hears you." Robbie's voice was low; but perhaps on that account it was more impressive, and the two lads who had "taken in vain" God's holy name were somewhat abashed.

"Yes, that's just the way," said Tom to his companion, leaving the shop as the blacksmith drew near. "A fellow has always a kind of uncomfortable feeling after he's been with Robbie Moore, for he does say the queerest things, and

a body keeps remembering 'em too."

"Keeps remembering!" Yes, that is just what God intended should be the result of Robbie's words; and the brave boy's defence of his Saviour's precious name was one more gem in the crown that was awaiting him.

It was the week before Christmas, and all the village people had been busy arranging evergreens and holly-wreaths for dressing the small village church. You know in the country all the young people, and even little folks, have a "finger in the pie" when it comes time for church-dressing; and so when on the night before Christmas the folks went to hang the

wreaths and make the little edifice as pretty as possible for Christmas morning, Robbie was carried in papa's arms to the church to see what was going on, and be amused as much as possible.

Mamma did not object, for looking at the white, patient face, she thought it unlikely her boy would be spared for another Christmas with them. The little hands were growing thinner, the puny form yet more puny, and the blue eyes had gradually changed their merry expression to a wistful, tender gaze which her own eyes in meeting his were unable to bear without tears.

So she wrapped him up warmly and kissed his sweet lips many times before papa at last hurried

away with the light burden in his arms. Baby was fretful, so the mother remained at home.

Robbie for his comfort was placed on one of the high-backed cushioned seats of the village squire's pew. He was the rich man among them all, and had manifested that fact in the furnishing of his pew. Robbie knelt on the cushions a little while and watched his father nailing and tying wreaths and festoons here and there, till the man had to return to his shop where one or two jobs awaited him, and left his boy in care of a neighbor who promised to see him safely home. Then the murmur of voices, the dim light of candles, and the comfortable warmth of the

church made Robbie sleepy; and from nodding on the back of the pew, his curly head finally slipped down against the cushioned seat and so the little boy slid off into dreamland and knew nothing more concerning holly-wreaths or evergreens.

The different groups finished their work at last, and one by one the candles burned out until with the hanging of the last wreath over the organ-pipes, but three candles were burning and the little church was almost shrouded in darkness.

"Robbie has slipped out himself, I reckon; I don't see him anywhere," said the neighbor in whose care the blacksmith had left his child; and so with his companions

he finally departed and Robbie slumbered on in the silence and darkness.

The blacksmith was detained until late in the evening with jobs which must be finished before the ringing of the Christmas bells. His wife aroused from her nap at baby's side by the ringing of the anvil-hammer, thought, "James has returned to his shop and Robbie is still with him," then sank to sleep again little knowing the lateness of the hour. Thus Robbie, whom papa supposed by that time to have been long asleep in his crib beside mamma's bed, was guarded in his unconsciousness by the high-backed pew and high old-fashioned pulpit which stood like a sentinel before

him, and more than all by the watchful eye far above the sleeping world.

But the cushion was not as comfortable as the crib, and Robbie first restless, then suddenly wide awake sat up in terror with a sense of something wrong. Where was he? In the darkness he felt for his mother's hand, always within reach of his before, but now—only the cold hard touch of wood! what did it mean? "Mamma!" he called, and for answer only the echo of his own weak voice. A sob, a cry, and presently it flashed upon his bewildered senses where he was. The man had forgotten him, and they had gone without him. "Oh, what will mamma and papa do!"

Then as he ceased his sobs and listened to see if somebody even then might not be returning for him, a flickering light in a far corner attracted his attention. Even while his startled eyes were watching it grew larger and brighter, and the boy at once realized that in some way the church had caught fire. Probably a candle dimly-burning had been overlooked when the men went out and as it burnt out had set fire to the brush near which it stood. The slender tongue of flame had slowly increased but when Robbie saw the blaze it was yet soon enough for a pail of water to have extinguished it altogether.

But alas! no water was at hand, nor could the child have handled a

bucket conveniently. He was alone in the desolate edifice, and nothing but the fitful and terrifying glare of that mischievous fire to show him his situation. But Robbie was wise, we remember, and brave at all times, and he knew that if the church were to be saved, only his little strength, with God's blessing, could avail at present. Frightened he was, of course, as any boy of his age would have been, and the brave blue eyes were tearful as they watched the tiny flames every instant gaining strength, while the little fellow dragged himself painfully towards the danger.

"The bell-rope! the bell-rope!" he thought, and groped his way along the vestibule floor until the

dangling rope was touched by his small trembling hands.

The blacksmith had just learned of Robbie's absence from home, and with great trepidation was leaving his house in search of the child when—one—two—three—on the clear night air rang out the silvery-tongued bell of the village church, rousing instantly from slumber the people far and near.

It was not long before the anxious father, little knowing the whole of his boy's situation, with many of the wondering neighbors hastily entered the church.

Meanwhile Robbie, after the third pull at the bell, crept back, to find the flames so greatly increased that if they were not speedily smothered

assistance might arrive too late; and with one prayer to the dear Father whom his little heart had learned to trust so truly, "Not to let the fire hurt him very much," he threw his small body down upon the flame, hoping to smother it out by his clothing, and roll away from it so speedily that he might escape danger.

Poor little boy! it was a brave thought; a brave, but impulsive deed, and it was hard that the little deformed body should have refused to obey the boy's will when he strove to save himself. But the back was too weak, the small limbs too helpless for even the resolute will, and the cruel flame scorched and mocked the boy who tried to

be its master. He was sadly burnt before his father came, with those eager strong arms of his, to snatch his dear child from the fire only partially arrested in its work of destruction; and while he hastened home and laid the moaning, quivering boy in his mother's arms, the neighbors speedily overcame the enemy, and their church was saved.

"Only for the boy it would have burned down, while we slept!" they exclaimed; but Robbie was lying unconscious and white on his mother's knees, and Dr. Blake having done all he could for his relief, kindly watched by his side through the night.

V.

CHRISTMAS morning dawned at last. Robbie's long-suspended consciousness was restored, and he lay weak as an infant—yes, weaker than the tiny sister who slumbered, the picture of health, in her cradle—on his small couch, listening to the chime of bells, and watching with serious eyes his weeping mother. His father, worn out with grief, had slept only when the gray dawn of morning stole softly in to bring the tidings of Christmas, and Robbie had not yet seen him.

But why did his mother cry so? he wondered. Why did she kiss him so frequently and look into his

eyes so mournfully? Thinking to cheer her he said faintly and with a wan little attempt at a smile, "Mamma, merry Christmas!" Poor little burned hands! they could not reach out to draw that dear mother closer, when she stooped over him; and oh, the pain in the weak back and the blistered limbs!

But Robbie knew he had saved the church from injury; they told him so as soon as he could listen, and he was a happy boy, notwithstanding his burns. "O mamma! I *was* good for something that time, was n't I?" he exclaimed, in his faint voice. "I could do *something* for people, after all, could n't I, mamma?" And loving kisses answered him, though mamma could

not speak. "Yes, the church was saved, and Robbie's being accidentally locked in was perhaps providentially ordered," she thought rather bitterly; but at what a price had the village received their church from the flames! Alas, at what a price!

When the night-shadows came softly down over the little town, and the Christmas day had slipped into the past, with its hours of mingled joy and pain had slipped away also so much of Robbie's feeble strength, that it became evident to all who looked upon him, how soon his gentle life would be only a sweet memory among them all.

"Mamma! papa!" he called.

"Here, Robbie!" they replied.

It was the night before New Year's day, and Robbie had suffered through the day fearfully; but now at the hour of twilight he was easier and wanted to talk. He looked at his little scarred hands, from which the bandages had been removed, and his lip quivered. "I cannot use them much ever again, can I, mamma?" he asked, as the parents drew nearer his bedside.

"I fear not, darling! But papa and mamma have well hands to use for Robbie."

"I 'm eight years old now, a' n't I, mamma?"

"Yes, dear boy; mamma's big boy, and a comfort to every one."

Robbie kissed his father's hand, and also laid his sweet lips against

his mother's tender hand ere he placed it over his eyes to hide the tears fast gathering there. Presently he said softly, "I've been thinking, dear mamma, and I'm most certain God doesn't want me to get well at all. I thought maybe when I grew a man I would be strong like papa; but it is *so* long, *so long!* and I only get weaker every day, and—and—O mamma, I don't believe I shall *ever* be a man!"

His mother tried to soothe him, but the pent-up tears overflowed at last, and the brave little heart was relieved after a while.

He turned his head to look about the room, and seemed to linger long over each familiar article.

"I don't suppose I can look at them very long," he said; "something here," he placed papa's hand over his heart, "tells me I—I am going to see Jesus pretty soon."

"O Robbie, don't talk so!" cried his mother. "Do you want to leave mamma and papa alone? and dear little sister—what will she do?"

The sweet blue eyes looked wistfully over to the crib where baby slept peacefully in all her beauty of fresh young life.

"If she should fall and hurt herself as *I* did, O *dear* mamma, wouldn't it be better if the doctor let her die than to be so useless as I have been, and only—only a hunchback!"

Then mamma put her arms about her boy and spoke quietly, while the blacksmith left the room to weep unobserved.

"Listen, Robbie, and see if you have been as useless as you think. You have drawn me, through your weakness, nearer to God. He saw that I needed to be brought nearer to him, and I knew it not. Sunday after Sunday we used to sing—do you remember it?—

"'Nearer my God to thee! nearer to thee,
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me.'

Well, dear, I sang the words maybe carelessly; but the spoken wish was granted, and your suffering, my precious child, your sickness was the 'cross' which God for my own good sent to raise my heart in

prayer nearer to him. O Robbie, darling boy! think what Jesus permitted you to do for mamma, although it cost you your strength and your freedom of limb. Then, think what a comfort to us both, papa and mamma, you have been since it happened that you could not run and play like other boys. You have made sunshine for your home every day, and yet you have not known what you were doing. I am sure that God knew, though, and he never forgets."

Oh! in many ways that even mamma was ignorant of, Jesus had known when and where and how little sick Robbie had done good to those about him. And the little fellow listened to his mother till a

smile came to drive the tears away, and he slept sweetly till the dawn of the glad New Year's day.

Billy Jones was sent by his mother to inquire how Robbie was feeling towards the close of that day.

"Come in and cheer him up a little!" said Mrs. Moore. Billy stood embarrassed beside the invalid.

"I 'm glad to see you, Billy," whispered Robbie holding out his scarred hand, "because I've been thinking about the last time you and I had a talk. Don't you remember you asked how I knew God watched us all the time? Well I know you 've got Bibles in your house, but I want you to take mine, here it is, and promise you 'll

read it ever so often; because I like you, Billy, and I don't want you to be wicked. Will you read it, please?"

Billy turned red all over his freckled face and stammered "Yes;" but his eyes filled with tears, unused to them though they were, and he felt almost as if he stood in the presence of death itself, for Robbie's face was as white as the snowy bed-linen and his eyes were sunken deep in their sockets.

"I 'll never steal again, Robbie," he said after a while, "only don't look so white and dreadful. O Robbie, I *will* be a good boy if *you* like me to. Nobody ever did care for me much, so I did n't care for myself, you see. But if you 'll get

well, I 'll do all you wish. I will truly, Robbie!" Then he went away, and saw Robbie Moore for for the last time living.

"Papa, will you take me down stairs?"

"Why, Robbie, don't you think you had better sleep now and be bright for tomorrow?"

"I don't feel sleepy, mamma, and if papa will take me I 'd like to go down just a minute!"

So he was carried down to the small sitting-room and placed easily before the fire. Robbie looked at the pictures on the wall, humble little specimens of the fine arts to be sure, but dear to him because he had seen them from babyhood: and he gazed long at each object

the room contained, till his parents in surprise questioned him. "I am looking good-by," he said seriously; "and now take me up again, please."

Sadly he was again taken to his room, and at his request placed beside the window on his father's knee. The boy looked out at the landscape, over the white fields, down the road towards the schoolhouse, at the small church where he had suffered that terrible night a week ago, over the road where the blacksmith's shop stood deserted because of the holiday, and last up at the bluish gray sky over which shadows were beginning to herald night's approach. The wistful eyes gazed long and earnestly

among the clouds and followed the golden path of the sun fast going to its rest behind the hills.

"It looks like a path made on purpose to lead to heaven, mamma, does n't it?" he asked presently. "Oh everything is so beautiful there! it does not seem hard to die when God makes the sky so beautiful for us!"

"Robbie, you are nervous, dear; lie down and try to sleep. Do n't talk of dying, darling! you make mamma feel dreadfully."

"Do I, mamma?" patting her cheek with his weak hand. "I do n't mean to! I 'll lie down now. Good-by, dear sky, dear fields and all dear places where I have played!" Then he turned to those who

watched him with a strange dread which their hearts could not throw off, and they laid him in his bed.

"I am glad that my soul is n't deformed now like my body, mamma!" he whispered. "I shall go to Jesus straight and strong, and not be ashamed to meet others there: that 's a comfort, is n't it?"

Ah, little Robbie! how many there are, neither you nor your parents can tell, who must appear before their Maker with souls deformed with sin and wickedness, so that the angels are fain to hide their eyes from the sight. Your poor body may have caused your little sensitive heart shame and distress more times than even your parents knew; but your soul, the beautiful

gem within the misshapen casket, ah! God would receive it in glory as white, unstained and perfect as Christ's blood and love could make it.

The night came swiftly on. Robbie slept till the old church clock struck the hour of one, when the sound roused him. "Give me your hand, mamma," he said without opening his eyes. "Kiss me, please!" faintly. A pause followed, during which his parents watched the strange mysterious shadow steal over the dear face.

"O Robbie! Robbie!" they cried, "do n't leave us, darling boy! what can we without you!"

Robbie lifted his heavy lids a moment. "Only a lame boy, but

I *loved* you, papa—mamma, just the same as if I 'd been well and straight. I 'm so tired!"

Then angels, unseen by mortal eyes, kissed down the white lids, and while Robbie slept with his hand still clasping mamma's, the message came from above, "Cast off his bonds, and bring the freed spirit to me." And up, up beyond the skies, through a golden flood of glory little Robbie's earthly vision had never beheld, the angels bore a ransomed soul and laid it tenderly on the Saviour's bosom.

When morning dawned the neighbors looked silently and tearfully upon a white sweet face where a smile rested never to be driven away by tears, and kind hands pre-

pared the helpless little body for its grave. But the father and mother wept together, and wondered if ever on earth again could be found a child whose life would be worth all their Robbie's had been despite his helplessness.

Two years before, "What will he ever be good for!" was the cry that reached the ear of God. And now the same heavenly ear heard the cry of that mother's heart, "Oh, what was he *not* good for! my own precious boy, who has brought me so much nearer to Thee!"

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